

A Powerhouse P.R. Practitioner for P.R.

By PHILIP H. DOUGHERTY

In a tiny, pale-wood paneled and cluttered office on the top floor of an East 80th Street townhouse the other morning at 9 Denny Griswold was already at work — not young but chic with upswept reddish hair, a powerhouse in a powerhouse business for a quarter of a century.

"She more than anybody else has been the focal point of public relations in this country," was the way Kalman B. Druck, president of Harshe-Rotman & Druck, a public relations firm, described her.

And, Farley Manning, who has his own company, remembered, "when public relations people were self-conscious about being flacks, she made the point that public relations men were making more of a contribution to American industry than just publicity."

What comes out of that townhouse's top floor is the Public Relations News, a pioneer newsletter celebrating its 25th anniversary with subscribers in all of the states and 76 other countries.

While Mrs. Griswold is a supporter of full disclosure she prefers to keep the size of the weekly mailing list to herself and says laughingly, "I want my friends to like me for myself not my circulation."

A feature of each issue of P.R. News is a public relations case study and every year Mrs. Griswold sponsors a luncheon at which the chief executives of the 10 best problem-solving companies are honored.

But since this is an anniversary year there will be something special March 31 at the Union League Club. The heads of the best 25 for the last quarter-century will be guests.

And Mrs. Griswold herself will be honored this month and next in New York, Belgium and Canada. As well she should, she holds her business in the highest regard.

For example, she said, "I think it's the greatest export of our democracy. Public relations can only exist in a climate of freedom."

Or, "When you're in the public relations business you're in the truth business. The public relations man who doesn't practice it is out."

And should you want a



The New York Times (by Jack Mannino)

Mrs. Denny Griswold, editor of weekly Public Relations News, in townhouse office

proper definition P.R. News has it.

"Public relations is the management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or an organization with the public interest, and plans and executes a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance."

That, however, was hardly the case when Mrs. Griswold and her late husband, Glenn, (whom she met and married when he was editor and publisher of Business Week) started publishing their newsletter.

In her little office and with emphatic gestures she told of how things had changed. Then, she remembered, there were about 25 corporations with "formal" departments, about 100 firms that called themselves public relations but often were merely publicity houses or press agents, and few schools offered courses in the art.

Today, however, she said, "tens of thousands" of companies have organized public relations and budget well over \$2-billion for them; there are more than

people in the field and 1,600 public relations firms, and some 18 universities offer degrees in public relations.

"But the greatest development is the new awareness of and understanding of public relations by top management," she said. "Twenty-five years ago you couldn't even imagine that a corporate officer would worry about employees getting involved in the community or concerned about minority groups."

A bit later she observed, "The days when the public relations man just stood outside the door and handed along a news release to a reporter are gone in the good companies."

Mrs. Griswold (now married to J. Langdon Sullivan) didn't come by her knowledge of the field by just writing about it. She worked in it.

With a bachelor's from Hunter College, a master's from Radcliffe and some work toward a doctorate at Columbia, the then Denny Prager got a job at Forbes Magazine and then moved on to Business Week and Mr. Griswold.

lic relations, first at J. Walter Thompson and then with two P.R. firms and finally started an agency with her husband. She talked him into the newsletter.

While she herself had reporting experience before she joined the field, she's far from believing that it is necessary for everyone. "I've long tried to expel the myth that it's needed, even though it's wonderful practical experience to have," she said, "but the only reason it happened like that in the past was that there was no place to study."

In the past, too, she observed, it was the production man in the corporation who was king, then it became the man in charge of distribution and then the financial genius. The age of the public relations man is almost at hand, she predicts.

"Now you'll find executives taken from the public relations ranks to head companies," she said. "Public relations know-how has become an indispensable quality for executive leadership."

Where did you say you could get one of those de-

Griswold?